

### *Not the whole picture*

I accepted Houston Chronicle reporter Brian Rosenthal's request to be interviewed for his story on special education in Texas after providing volumes of data that he requested over the last several months. When the article was published, I was disappointed to see that nothing I said during our hour-long, face-to-face interview in my office made it into the article.

I am proud of the work our team does to meet the needs of 16,000 students with disabilities in the Houston Independent School District. We appreciate and respect parents of these children, and we do not take their trust in our schools lightly.

In HISD, we endeavor to address each child's unique needs through proactive, preventive research-based interventions. When possible, we strive to avoid labeling children because research shows that the "special education" designation can carry an unfair stigma in our society that can harm a child.

Houston schools are currently serving 3,000-plus students with dyslexia through reading interventions that, in most cases, avoid giving them the "special education" label. In 2010, only 560 HISD students were identified as having dyslexia. During that same time period, we have seen a 64 percent increase in students identified with autism.

The decline in HISD's special education population resulted from an intentional decision to more thoughtfully address the needs of students who, in the past, would have been labeled under special education. In HISD, we believe that serving children should be our goal, not putting a label on them.

I urge any parent who believes their child needs to be evaluated for special education services to contact us, and I give my personal assurance that their child's needs will be fully addressed. Parents can access many resources on our website, including the process for referring their child for an evaluation.

Sowmya Kumar,

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